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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

1876.

INDEPENDENCE DAY.

ITS

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION IN DAYTON.

THE EXERCISES AT THE PARK.

ORATION

OF

COLONEL M. P. NOLAN, 1873-

One hundred years have elapsed since the Declaration of Independence was produced and read for the first time in public at the central window of Independence Hall, Philadelphia, by Colonel John Nixon. This being the one hundredth anniversary of our National independence, we have assembled to commemorate the glorious achievements of our ancestors, in producing to the world that declaration just read to you. As a people, we, on this Centennial occasion, have met in order to pay that tribute of gratitude and respect so justly due to those to whom, under God, we are indebted for the twin blessings, LIBERTY AND INDEPENDENCE.

Where is there a man with heart so cold, so lost to every generous impulse, that feels no thrill of enthusiasm shooting through his frame at the rehearsal of the Declaration of Independence, the MAGNA CHARTA of American liberty? Where, I ask, is he who can listen to the sentiments therein expressed without being moved by the deepest gratitude to those who have thus nobly pledged themselves to stand or fall with the interests of their country, and who staked fortune, life, and sacred honor in defense of the right of self-government?

The custom of our country which causes us upon this Centennial occasion to take from its shelf this paper to which we are indebted so much, to expose it to the gaze of a free people, and read it to the descendants and successors of those who fought and bled in its defense, has been complied with. We have listened with attention to its expressions; we have heard with pleasure the words of that sacred pledge given by the signers, to resist the encroachments of a tyrannical government; we have heard their calm, dignified, and, at the same time, bold and determined language; we trace in every line their regret at their approaching separation from the mother country. But we also trace their determinations never to submit to her unjust exactions. The Government of Great Britain little thought that among the humble descendants of the Pilgrims it would meet with men bold enough to set at defiance their whole power—men who would hurl back the haughty menaces of the King with scorn; men who would brave every danger and undergo every species of trial and suffering rather than abate one particle of that freedom which they had determined to obtain. Blindly trusting to their own power, and expecting nothing less than an unqualified submission and passive obedience from the colonies, in an evil hour for themselves the British Ministry framed a bill which would authorize them to replenish their exhausted treasury and provide means to prosecute a European war by the imposition of unjust taxes on the colonies, thus appropriating to themselves the wealth of the western world. In addition to this, the colonies had experienced most intolerable wrongs and injustice at the hands of the British Government. They were goaded until patience ceased to be a virtue.

But the obstinacy of the British Government soon put a stop to the forbearance of the colonial people. The crisis was impending when they were to stand forth in defense of the principles contained in the declaration. They found that petitioning and remonstrances were not the arms that must be used in their defense, but that nothing less than open resistance could secure to them the rights and privileges consistent with a free people. The enforcement of acts for their taxation was a signal for the colonists to throw off their lethargy and manfully appeal to arms. They thought in anger upon the wrongs they had suffered; they remembered that their fathers had been driven by oppression from old England to New England; they recall to their minds their stories of suffering and distress, and hurled back the insults of the mother country, with determinations to achieve their independence or perish in the attempt. **THEY SUCCEEDED!**

After seven years of disastrous warfare, after an incredible amount of suffering and distress; after a succession of disasters seldom experienced in the history of nations, and sufficient to have broken the spirit of any other people on earth, they stood forth in the power of freedom, proud of their liberty and their acts of heroism in achieving it. The arm of oppression was broken; the struggle was now over, and America was free. The star of British glory paled and grew dim before the rising sun of American Independence. The old mangy lion of England crouched under the talons of the young American eagle. The new nation arose like a phoenix emerging from its ashes. It shone forth like the sun, when, dispelling the mists of morning, he appeared again, gladdening nature with the return of light and life. It burst forth on the world's vision as

beautiful as new. England wasted her treasure and shed the best blood of her subjects in an unsuccessful attempt to preserve her dominion over the colonies, whom by a course of moderation and justice, she might have attached inviolably to herself.

Let us dwell for a moment upon those men, as they pass before us in our minds, high and determined as they stood this day one hundred years ago, when about to sign the Declaration of Independence. Where on the pages of history can such an assemblage be found? Where can we read of such a body of men in the act of signing such a deed? Does the valor of Leonidas, with his three hundred braves at Thermopelyæ, equal their calm determination and the fixed purpose of those liberators of our country? Is there an example on record of such cool and determined bravery called into action in support of so sublime and patriotic a design? There is not.

How the fame which mighty despots have derived from bloody conquest sinks into insignificance when contrasted with the splendor which actions like these confer upon those who have achieved them! How wan and pale are the chaplets that deck the brow of a Cesar or an Alexander when contrasted with the laurels which encircle the brows of a Washington or a Jefferson!

We turn with pleasure from the blood stained annals of other nations, whose every page is soiled with legends of rapine and massacre, to the simple annals of our own Revolution. The declaration declares that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain natural, inherent, and inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It denies the tyrant's dogma of the divine right of Kings to rule over mankind; it asserts that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and solemnly affirms the right of the American people to govern themselves as a free and independent nation.

Then we have the ordinance of 1787, introduced by Nathen Dane, of Massachusetts, providing, among other things, that every sixteenth section of all public lands shall be forever dedicated to the support of public schools, thus making the education of the future citizen a covenant running with the land. Wise provisions, for this vast Republic, being of the people, for the people, and by the people, can only be maintained by an educated people. No tongue can speak nor pen write the dangers of ignorance to a Government like this, so vast and so varied in its resources, so comprehensive in its connections, with its large and increasing population, and the composite nature of our people, all of which was, in the second decade of our Government, anticipated by the thinking minds of our early statesmen.

The third paper writing we have is the Constitution. This is an instrument reducing to practice the principles of the Declaration of Independence, or regulating liberty by law. It defines and circumscribes the powers and duties of the National Government. It was ordained by the fathers, in order to form a "more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote

the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity."

In the one hundred years which this day terminates, we have had three grand epochs, and Providence has furnished us with a man gifted for each emergency.

THE FIRST EPOCH.

In the darkest hour of the infant Republic, we see the colossal form of Washington emerging from the chaos, inspiring confidence in the desponding hearts of the adherents of freedom. His practical knowledge, his heroic courage and endurance, his statesman-like views, his power to conciliate, his administrative capacity, and his success, gave to him the name of Father of his Country. Lowly as the colonies were when he assumed command, he was determined that they should not long so remain. He cheered them by his council; he called upon them to assume their might, and convinced them of the strength that slumbered in their breasts. He put brave thoughts into their hearts and bold words into their mouths. Always he was their companion, and always he was their friend. He had the confidence of all; he was truly influential. His words were resistless, for they were the echoes of the hearts around him; and to the beating of the hearts of the Revolutionary fathers, his own great heart kept time. He loved his country with an enthusiasm that death only could quench. She was the passion of his soul and the devotion of his life.

THE SECOND EPOCH.

England was never satisfied with the results of the Revolutionary War. She kindled and kept burning in the untutored mind of the savage Indians malice against the frontier settlers, exciting them to acts of cruelty and outrage against defenseless women and children as well as men. She also excited against the settlers of the South and Lower Mississippi the enmity of France and Spain. She kept her fleets cruising off our bays and harbors, impressing our seamen, frequently landing swarms of sailors and mercenaries upon the coast, who plundered the people, and destroyed their property. One of her fleets ascended the Potomac, and in August, 1814, burned the Capitol and its library, destroyed all the printing-offices, sending President Madison on a pic-nic to Virginia. England was having things her own way; but Jackson, stern and stoic, exclaimed: "By the Eternal, the power of England in these States must end." All he claimed he asserted, and all he asserted he accomplished.

When the capitol fell, all eyes were turned toward New Orleans. England sent a large fleet and army to capture this unprotected gem of the South. Jackson, anticipating the design, assembled his forces in front of the city, assumed the responsibility of proclaiming martial law, placed his little army behind cotton bales, and received the advancing red-coats with all the warmth of his Celtic heart, and with such a destructive fire as laid their dead bodies in winrows.

Peckingham, the commander of this expedition, while crossing over the Atlantic, paced the quarter-deck of his flag-ship in all

"Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war."

Landing at the head of fifteen thousand victors of European battle-fields, on the eighth day of January, 1815, he commenced the attack.

Jackson rose above the storm, and was serene in the whirlwind. The annals of bloody strifes furnish no parallel to the carnage that ensued. Two thousand British soldiers, with their commander, fell. An army which never before retreated from a battle-field now fled in wild disorder from the avenging Jackson to their ships, bearing with them their dead commander. Jackson's loss was seven killed and six wounded.

Upon the return voyage of that fleet there was lashed upon the main deck of the principal frigate a cask containing the remains of its late commander, embalmed, a la American, in pure distilled spirits, which were not produced in a registered distillery, that never saw a gauger, that had no United States Internal Revenue stamp upon its bung-stave or either head, that never trickled through a Tyce meter or entered the portals of a bonded warehouse. After this expedition returned to England with all evidence of disaster, without even a trophy, and nothing of interest aboard but the remains of its late commander still in the original package, she gave up the people of the United States as incorrigible, and abandoned us to our fate. Jackson ended all wars with England. With Clay, Calhoun, and other contemporaries, he might not always have been right, but with his country he was never in the wrong.

THIRD EPOCH.

Nearly half a century had glided by when our people were subjected to another test by which we demonstrated to the world that, as a people, we were capable of self-government. Slavery, being the complete and absolute subjection of one man to the will, the control, and disposal of another man by legalized force, was long the bane of contention, and was a cancer left on the body politic by the framers of the Government for "peace sake," which spread gradually over the Southern States, and its noxious tendrils were creeping toward the free territories. This withering pestilence, so obnoxious to the civilized world, against justice, nature, religion and law, with its bloated carcass across the path of progress, must be eradicated. The election of Lincoln President in 1860, who was known as an anti-slavery man, and who had declared that this Government could not endure half slave and half free, was seized upon as a pretext by the slave aristocracy for the secession of the slave-holding States, and thereupon declared war by firing upon Fort Sumter, over which floated our flag, the ensign of American nationality, the visible emblem of the sovereignty of the Union, whose stars represent the sister States, whose stripes the original 13 States, and whose colors, courage, purity and truth.

The enemies of republics were swift to predict the downfall of ours at this crisis. But History, whose work is at best but gloomy, did not take up her pen to write the story of the American Republic in despair. At the first signal from President Lincoln the people responded. The fight was theirs. There assembled an army comprising the industry, wealth, intellect and muscle of the country, and as numerous and pestilential to the rebels as the grasshoppers to the Grangers. And slavery was obliterated.

Lincoln, though elected by a party, became the Executive of all. His simplicity of manners, his clear and unprejudiced mind, his integrity, his courage, and his clemency, won for him the appellation of "Honest

Old Abe." But the crowning glory of this man's life was his proclamation of September 22, 1862, by which four millions were emancipated; and with that sublime event will the name of Abraham Lincoln be forever associated. But not with this circumstance alone will the name of Lincoln be revered; but his fame for the perpetuation of free institution will grow higher and brighter as freedom covers the earth, and until a slave is not known on the planet.

A GLANCE AT HISTORY.

We have our civilization from the East, and its march westward round our globe, forming a zone of intellectual light as clearly discernible as the torrid, temperate or frigid zones. Within the historic period there have existed three great races, from which we sprung—the Israelites, who had pride of race; the Greeks, who had pride of knowledge, and the Romans, who had pride of power. In the dimness of time, we begin with the land of Confucius, thence westward over the western countries of Asia, across Arabia into Africa, tarrying a while in Egypt, where, long before the Pharaohs, previous to the Jewish dispensation, before Joseph became a model of probity or speculated in wheat, and long anterior to the visits of Herodotus or Pythagorus, Egypt was mistress of the world.

Taking another step westward, we find it passing along Asia Minor, crossing the Hellespont into Greece, where we see the dawn of the drama and get the first glimpse of a republic; and Greece, in her day, through her law-givers, her arms, her arts, her orators, and her architecture, was the intellectual sun whose rays illuminated the world both East and West.

Then intelligence took another step westward, entering the eastern confines of the Roman Empire, reaching as far as Italy, then extending over the Italian Peninsula and Sicily, when Rome arises august and majestic on both sides of the classic Tiber, whose very ruins speak man's skill as a mechanic in those temples where men have reasoned, and in the churches where women pray; in its sculpture, painting, oratory, heroes, history, agriculture and its republic; and Rome in her day was the enormous head-light whose rays flashed across Western Europe, gilding the island heights of Britain and Hibernia. Rome had her decline when the western countries of Europe, her late colonial possessions, sprang up from provinces to nations.

France, in the days of Charlemagne, was the center of learning, science and arts, and the dictator of Western Europe—a power she never relinquished until Richelieu expired.

Again progressing toward the setting sun, civilization penetrated all the western kingdoms of Europe, diffusing itself over the Spanish Peninsula and Portugal, leaving to us, as the creations of its progress, the cities of Venice, Paris, Madeira, Genoa, Cordova, Antwerp, London, Lisbon, Bologne, and Florence. For centuries men of learning from Greece and Rome penetrated the wilds of Western Europe, who were the ferrymen between ancient and modern civilization, and who brought with them from those classic strongholds mental materials for the schools and universities of the West.

Again we move westward another step, and civilization crosses the English channel; diffusing itself over the islands of Great Britain and

Ireland. The kings, princes, and nobles of England were the patrons of learning. Instruction was sought by kings and people alike. Subjects suggested to sovereigns. *MAGNA CHARTA* was wrenched from the iron gripe of King John. Freedom began to know her rights, and was gathering strength to maintain them. Bacon was sounding the depths of human understanding. Chivalry was melting before the ridicule of Cervantes in his "Don Quixote." The practical was banishing the romantic. Religion was busying all brains. Philosophy was filling the earth with its wisdom and research. Poetry was covering the earth with its charms. Fiction was delighting mankind with its enchantments. Shakspeare arranged the seven ages of man, and "found tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." And the result of all this we have the civil and common law of England—the science that distinguishes the "criteria of right and wrong." The heart of Europe palpitated. Traditional claims lost in every contest against natural justice. Commerce enlarged her boundaries; wealth increased with enterprise. Independence had grown with industry, and the interests of freedom went boldly forward.

With Columbus civilization took its last long stride westward, and in the United States the zone is completed. And to-day we are the greatest people that the sun of heaven gladdens with his beams; for here we have free institutions, possess free education, have a thirst for knowledge, and the spirit of progress. The people of no other country could have produced the Declaration of Independence; could have conformed to its spirit and teachings, preserved it intact, and lived up to its letter. Here the people govern themselves; each one is a stockholder, with shares paid up. The usages and customs of a civilized people are the gradual results of their wants and wishes.

Besides, the physical structure of our country, so extensive and diversified, can not produce an indifferent people; and the minds of the people partake of the largeness of the land they inhabit; for here all creeds, nationalities and colors are tolerated and protected. Here all are peers and none are peasants.

Within the century our people have shot up in strength and prosperity beyond the most visionary calculations. Beginning with thirteen States and three million inhabitants scattered along the Atlantic coast, now we have forty millions of inhabitants, and thirty-eight States and nine Territories, extending from ocean to ocean, across which we whisper in an instant by telegraph, or glide over in a few hours by rail. A land that teems with industry; the Union gives the laborer homes, suffrage, wages, peace, plenty, equality, and educates his children. As a people, we have complied with the Scriptural injunction, "Go forth, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it;" and this is all owing to that Creative Being whose essence has no form and whose workings no sound. We are a people of great destinies, and will ameliorate the condition of man throughout the world. We live in a land of facts, and are the graduate of the universe.

A further evidence of our refinement is the deference shown to woman, whose goodness is less the result of circumstances than man, and less owing

to culture or race. In refined society woman rises in importance and is generally appreciated. Having been intended as the companion of man, how accurately she fulfills the design of the Creator.

Our country is peculiarly one of masses, whose gatherings are truly sublime, mingling together in the dignity of individual choice and sentiment, yet with the power of collective will, diffused over the entire country, occupying the entire recess, intertwined in every interest, and regulating every movement of national glory. Think of the millions of men, wherever they may dwell, tossed upon the billows of either ocean, roughing life on our lakes and rivers, chopping down the forest, plowing the prairie and ditching its swamp land; with its many hands and strong arms,—in the fields, cities, factories, furnaces and mills, in the foundry, at the bench, at the lathe, at the forge, in the mines, in the quarries and ship-yards, no matter how lodged or clothed, whether it be a marble palace on Fifth avenue, a log hut in Arkansas, or a dugout in Nebraska. Think of all these, and it gives us the proof of a greatness that no earthly conceptions can well outmeasure.

So long as the Declaration of Independence is understood and appreciated, so long will we endure as a nation. The custom of reviving our faith annually is a time-honored one. The Israelites annually observe with great reverence their deliverance from Egyptian bondage; the Christian world annually celebrate the birth of Christ on the 25th of December, and the loyal subjects celebrate the birthdays of their respective tyrants annually, or the anniversary of some great battle, in which, perhaps, their own liberties were stricken down. Republics have flourished in Greece and Rome, the fairest portions of the earth, but there are no traces in either now to be seen, and nothing heard but the screech of the owl and the cry of the raven. The climate of these countries have undergone no change, but the people have lost their love for free institutions which their liberties could not outlive.

One hundred years have glided by since the experiment of man for self-government has been going on upon this continent, and its enemies admit that it is an eminent success. Some there are who find fault, and one stump orator, while passing over this country, speaking to mixed audiences, in 1872, declared that we live in a despotism. This is simply incorrect, to speak mildly; but if it be despotism, neither the country from which he emigrated, nor the people thereof, nor the people of any other country on God's green earth, was ever able to produce another despotism like it.

The anniversary of the Fourth of July is an event which, as citizens, we should not disregard. We have the same reasons for its observance that our predecessors had. We must watch over and guard the interest of our government like the emblematic eagle, with an eye that never winks and a wing that never tires. We are the trustees to posterity. These blessings, founded upon the Declaration of Independence, which we have received from those who have passed away, were to be by us preserved and enjoyed in our day and generation, and transmitted by us to those who are to succeed us.

With the injunction, "Be just and fear not, let all the ends thou aimest at be thy country's, thy God's, and truth's," thus will our noble Government be transmitted from father to son and from generation to generation down to the last syllable of recorded time.

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